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IN THE CLAIMS

The status of claims in this application is as follows:

1. (Currently amended) An image search apparatus, ~~which searches image data according to keywords stored in relation to said image data, said image search apparatus comprising:~~

~~input means for inputting a search query;~~

~~storage means for storing a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of images;~~

~~search means for searching said plurality of image data images according to the an input search query related to the keyword inputted by said input means and the keywords stored in relation to said image data;~~

~~acquiring means for acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data based on the images searched by said search means; and~~

~~output means for outputting the said plurality of image data images searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword acquired by said acquiring means.~~

2. (Currently amended) An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said output means outputs the said plurality of image data images according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance ~~is~~ are not stored in relation to the keywords keyword.

3. (Currently amended) An image search apparatus according to claim 1, ~~which searches image data according to keywords stored in relation to said image data, said image search apparatus comprising:~~

~~storage means storing the keywords stored in relation to said image data, synonyms of said keywords, and accordance between said keywords and said synonyms;~~

~~input means for inputting a search query;~~

~~search means for searching said image data according to the search query inputted by said input means, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, and the synonyms stored by said storage means;~~

~~first acquiring means for acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said search means;~~

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wherein ~~second~~ said acquiring means ~~for acquiring~~ acquires said a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said keyword and said input search query ~~when said search means has searched said image data according to said synonyms;~~ and said output means ~~for outputting~~ outputs the said plurality of image data images searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the ~~keywords~~ keyword acquired by said ~~first~~ acquiring means and said level of accordance acquired by said ~~second~~ acquiring means.

4-5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently amended) An image search apparatus according to ~~any of claims~~ claim 1 through 3, wherein said image search apparatus is provided in a server of an information retrieval system on the Internet, ~~said an~~ an input means receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of said information retrieval system on the Internet, said output means outputting the said plurality of image data images searched by said search means in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

7. (Currently amended) An image search method applied to an image search apparatus, ~~which searches image data according to keywords stored in relation to said image data;~~ said image search method comprising:
 ~~an input step of inputting a search query;~~
 a storage controlling step of storing a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of images;
 a searching step of searching said plurality of image data images according to the an input search query related to the keyword inputted by said input step and keywords stored in relation to said image data;
 an acquiring step of acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data based on the images searched by said searching step; and
 an output step of outputting the said plurality of image data images searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword acquired by said acquiring step.

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8. (Currently amended) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein ~~the said plurality of image data images~~ are output according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance ~~is~~ are not stored in relation to the ~~keywords~~ keyword.

9. (Currently amended) An image search method according to claim 7, applied to an image search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords stored in relation to said image data, said image search method comprising:

~~a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, synonyms of said keywords, and accordance between said keywords and said synonyms;~~

~~an input step of inputting a search query;~~

~~a searching step of searching said image data according to the search query inputted by said input step, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, and the synonyms stored by said storage controlling step;~~

~~a first acquiring step of acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said searching step;~~

~~wherein a second acquiring step of acquiring said a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said keyword and said input search query is acquired when said image data have been searched according to said synonyms by said searching step; and~~

~~an output step of outputting the said plurality of image data images are output, said plurality of images searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword acquired by said first acquiring step and said level of accordance acquired by said second acquiring step.~~

10-11. (Cancelled)

12. (Currently amended) An image search method according to ~~any of claims~~ claim 7 through 9, wherein ~~said an~~ input step comprises receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said output step outputting ~~the said plurality of image data images~~ searched by said searching step in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

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13. (Currently amended) A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image search applied to an image search apparatus, ~~which searches image data according to keywords stored in relation to said image data, said storage medium comprising instructions for:~~

~~inputting a search query;~~

~~storing a keyword table in a memory, wherein the keyword table includes a keyword that corresponds to a plurality of images, and a plurality of levels of importance of the keyword with respect to said plurality of images;~~

~~searching said plurality of image data images according to the an input search query related to the keyword inputted by said input instruction and the keywords stored in relation to said image data;~~

~~acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data based on the images searched by said searching instruction; and~~

~~outputting the said plurality of image data images searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword acquired by said acquiring instruction.~~

14. (Currently amended) A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein ~~the said plurality of image data images~~ are output according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance is are not stored in relation to the keywords keyword.

15. (Currently amended) A storage medium ~~that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image search applied to an image search apparatus according to claim 13, which searches image data according to keywords stored in relation to said image data, said storage medium comprising instructions for:~~

~~storing the keywords stored in relation to said image data, synonyms of said keywords, and accordance between said keywords and said synonyms;~~

~~inputting a search query;~~

~~searching said image data according to the search query inputted by said input instruction, the keywords stored in relation to said image data, and the synonyms stored by said storing instruction;~~

~~acquiring importance of the keywords, the importance being stored in relation to the keywords stored in relation to said image data searched by said searching instruction;~~

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wherein acquiring said a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said keyword and said input search query is acquired when said image data have been searched according to said synonyms by said searching instruction; and

outputting the said plurality of image data images are output, said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keywords keyword and said level of accordance.

16-17. (Cancelled)

18. (Currently amended) A storage medium according to ~~any of claims claim~~ claim 13 through 15, wherein ~~said an~~ input instruction comprises receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said output instruction outputting the said plurality of image data images searched by said searching instruction in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.